

Why do princes need princesses? by General_KJ

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Summary:

He was the crown prince of Indiana. You would think his life would be great, right?

Wrong.

Being a prince sucked and anyone that told you otherwise didn't have Ted of house Wheeler, King of Indiana as a father. Sure the life of luxury he lived helped lessen his burden, but not by nearly enough in his opinion. His life was a constant list of tasks that he had to perform for his father.

Learn how to adequately govern a kingdom. Train to be one of the greatest swordsmen in the kingdom. Befriend people of importance in neighbouring kingdoms to forge alliances. Entertain overweight lords and ladies with overinflated senses of self-importance. And most importantly marry a suitable lady and produce heirs to continue the

Wheeler line.

1. Sleepless nights

Notes for the Chapter:

I probably shouldn't start new longfics when I already have several ongoing but I needed to get this out of my head, its unique at least. Byler content is still Byler content and I'm one of the only ones still producing currently :-)

This will contain smut in later chapters, more tags will be added as we go along and as always for me this is to be treated as a prologue chapter, future chapters will be longer. Enjoy :-)

The distant lights of the kingdom below Mike's balcony glimmered like they were their own galaxy waiting to be explored as he stared down at them mournfully. Each one had its own story to tell that he would never hear, no matter how much he wanted to.

He hummed quietly to himself miserably as he turned his head to look at a different part of the capital. Even in the dead of night the city of Indianapolis bustled with activity. The only part of the city that was quiet was the area nearby. Anyone who dared make noise around Castle Hawkins whilst the royal family slept had hell to pay. Mike didn't mind the noise though, it was something to pierce the endless series of self-deprecating thoughts that constantly plagued his mind.

Instead the noises of the bustling city filled his brain with images of domestic bliss that he wished that he could have. Scenes of families sitting around the dinner table eating their food whilst making pleasant conversation. Scenes of friends sipping glasses of cold beer together whilst chattering contentedly, exchanging old stories. Scenes of parents tucking their kids into bed and kissing them goodnight. All these simple things he had never experienced but he couldn't help but miss them.

The peasants may be poor but at least they had somewhat fulfilling lives.

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He had already done every single task on that list apart from the last one with all the grace and decorum that was expected of a prince. But the last one was more irksome and as such he had made no effort to fulfil it. Every time his father and mother asked him about finding a good woman he was quick to dodge the question. His parents had grown used to his constant rebuffs but that didn't stop them trying.

Maybe they would if they knew the real reason why he had no interest in finding the perfect woman.

He had made it to the ripe old age of 18 without having to make a commitment to a woman. He had humoured the various wenches his parents had tried to set him up with over the years, but he was always quick to reject their advances. The blatant attempts that these various women made to seduce him disgusted him and made him want to throw up the contents of his stomach. Why other men found the sensation of women inappropriately touching them appealing he would never know.

As soon as he had his last birthday though his parents had seemingly had enough and had practically forced him to send a marriage proposal to a princess he had never met. His father had obviously been in negotiations with the ruler of this kingdom for a fair while

and with an unmarried son as a bargaining tool an alliance was quickly struck.

He really should have seen this coming, and in hindsight he would have pretended to be courting some random girl to prevent his parents from pulling this. It was hardly the first time arranged marriages had been a thing; he knew for a fact that both his mother and the wife of his father's chief advisor had been forced to marry their husbands. It was also no surprise that both of them had considered, or were considering an affair, but that wasn't his story to tell.

It was all too late now though and this was why he was where he was now. Standing by his balcony in the middle of the night staring off into the distance, wishing for a different life. Tomorrow was the day of Eleanor of house Hopper, princess of Illinois' arrival and she would be staying with them for the entire month preceding their wedding. He supposes he should be thankful that he at least gets a month to get to know his bride before marrying her.

Mike grips the marble railing tighter as he shivers due to a surprisingly cold gust of wind. The summer night was reasonably warm apart from the occasional puff of wind carried over from the nearby great lake. As such he was only dressed in his usual blue silk undergarments, which did make the freezing wind a bit more biting. All this was just a distraction though from the fact he didn't want to think about the next day but he simultaneously couldn't stop thinking about it.

The real reason he had never had any interest in women was the fact that he was a homosexual and marrying a princess wasn't going to change that. He had no clue what this princess even looked like and yet his skin was already crawling with the thought of being intimate with her. Even the thought of kissing her was distasteful. He had never been with a woman, and he didn't want to start now.

But the things he wanted were sinful and unacceptable to the rest of the kingdom. He may be the most popular member of the royal family, but if the citizens learned of his secret they would instantly turn on him and he would be stoned to death where he stood. He couldn't have a life with a man, that just wasn't possible. He needed

to learn to be with a woman or he wouldn't survive very long. There was no escape, he had no choice.

But this was who he was, he couldn't help but crave the touch of men and especially the touch of one man in particular.

As if he had said his name aloud, Mike suddenly jumped when he felt strong, familiar arms encircling his waist. "Mikey, come back to bed," the owner of the arms whined sleepily as he rested his head on the back of Mike's neck and pressed their bodies together snugly.

Mike couldn't help but smile after he recovered from his surprise. Will's touch never failed to make him feel better. He was so glad that he had someone as beautiful and kind as Will in his life. They had been together for years at this point. When they both realised that their childhood friendship had more to it, they were quick to figure things out. Even if the other hadn't felt the same way they were both loyal to a fault and would never have betrayed the other, so they felt little fear in confessing.

It was ironic that they were both the sons of the most notorious homophobes in the kingdom.

Lonnie of house Byers, lord of Mirkwood was his father's closest friend and his chief advisor and as such spent the majority of his time in the capital. Mike had been introduced to his son Will when they were both 5 years old and were just expected to get along with each other. Their fathers just hadn't anticipated how well they would get along. Now that his elder sister had married Will's older brother, Lonnie spent almost all his time in the capital with Jonathon able to take care of his lands.

Mike couldn't help but envy his sister and his brother in law. They had managed to marry the person they loved whilst still fulfilling their parents' wishes. It wasn't fair, he would never get that with Will. No one would ever know how much he loved the brunette that was currently holding him in his arms and if they did they would execute him.

In the years of his father's reign the laws against homosexuals and other deviants had only become harsher. He couldn't count the

number of executions he had been forced to attend of boys and girls that carried the same affliction as he did. Will's father had been on the warpath for as long as he could remember, determined to destroy the disease to prevent it from affecting his own family. Little did he know that all the years he spent trying to beat it out of his son had had the opposite effect.

"I can't sleep, baby. Just go back to bed, I'll join you soon," Mike whispered back as he felt Will's fingers tracing the hard muscles in his stomach that were well developed from years of swordplay. Will needed his sleep, he would have to sneak back into his own room at the crack of dawn to prevent them being discovered. He was thankful that Will's room wasn't far away so that they could afford to sleep together as often as they did.

"Are you thinking about it again?" Will asked after a few moments of peaceful silence. Will just knew him too well.

"I never stop," he confided with a miserable groan.

"We always knew this day would come eventually," Will reasoned. "That doesn't mean we have to love each other any less. I'm sure countless people like us have had secret partners whilst seemingly living a normal life over the years."

"But I don't want you to be a secret," Mike replied, moving his hands from the railing to cover Will's hands that were circled around his waist and hold them more firmly together. "I don't want to have to be with someone else, you're all I've ever wanted."

"I know, honey. I feel the same way. It's going to hurt letting you be with someone else as well as me, but if it means that you get to live then I'm ok with that."

"It's not fair."

"Life's not fair, Mikey."

They were quiet for a few minutes as they just stood there on the balcony comforting each other. What Will said was all true though. This was their life, they had no choice.

"I never wanted to be a prince," Mike suddenly said, breaking the silence. Will was quiet for a moment before answering.

"Well, what would you want to be instead?" Will questioned with a hint of humour in his voice.

Mike thought for a second as he had never really thought this through before. An idea popped into his head as he looked at the forests in the distance. "I want to be a lumberjack," he responds excitedly, his voice suddenly full of a newfound confidence.

"I must say I wasn't expecting that one," Will giggled in response. "Where has this grand plan come from?"

"Can't you picture it? Using an axe isn't that different to using a sword. I would be brilliant at that," Mike exclaims triumphantly. "But the best part is that we would get to live on our own in a little cabin in the middle of the woods. No one else for miles around, no one to judge us."

"Why are you the lumberjack? I'm better with a sword than you are," Will laughed as he squeezed Mike's stomach jovially.

"No you're not, and that's not the point. The point is that we would get to be on our own, we would get to be in love without anyone trying to tell us it's wrong. Why can't we do that?"

"Mikey," Will said slowly as if preparing him for disappointment. "Even if we weren't who we are, we still couldn't be together. In every kingdom homosexuality is punishable by death. No matter where we go, we wouldn't be safe."

"So we never get to be happy?" Mike spat angrily.

"People like us don't get happy endings," Will responded sadly. "You're going to marry a beautiful princess and become king one day, and I will soon be forced into my own marriage to someone I don't love. Even when you become King you can't change anything. People won't accept what we are in our lifetime and for all we know they never will."

Mike knew Will was right really, he had come to the same

conclusions himself already. This is just how things had to be. But that didn't mean he wanted to accept it. Homophobia was everywhere, they had even had uncomfortable conversations with their friends about it. They didn't see them often but they were still their friends.

Dustin of house Henderson, prince of Kentucky and his fiancé Suzie were kind but didn't understand how anyone could love the same gender. Lucas of house Sinclair, prince of Ohio was even worse though. He had thought that maybe he would be more understanding because of his own struggles with acceptance because of his skin colour, but sadly this was not the case. At least his fiancé Maxine of house Mayfield, princess of California was making him slightly more liberal. California was one of the more accepting kingdoms even if homosexuality was still outlawed.

"I know but that doesn't make it any less depressing to think about," Mike replied as he let himself lean against Will's sturdy frame.

They just stood there for a few minutes basking in the feeling of being together like this. They wouldn't be able to do this for much longer. Mike would soon have to share a bed with his wife. The last month of sharing a bed with someone he actually loved.

"Is there anything I could, you know, do to make you feel better?" Will asked in a strange tone of voice indistinguishable from his previous one. Mike didn't have time to understand it before it became obvious by Will's hands moving from his waist to his crotch. His clothed cock twitched with mild interest when Will squeezed it but Mike's head knew that he wasn't really feeling it.

He removed Will's hands delicately, noting the slight whine of disappointment. "Aren't you still sore from earlier?" Mike asked, unable to keep the smirk off his face as he remembered what had occurred a few hours previously. Though it didn't really matter as Will couldn't see it from his position behind him.

"Maybe a little," Will admitted shyly. "But if it would help you clear your head then I don't mind. We could do it the other way around if you're worried about hurting me."

“Thank you for offering Willy, but I think I will be fine. You can go back to bed, I just need a few more minutes to myself,” Mike responded kindly.

Will hesitated for a moment like he was going to argue but eventually seemed to concede. “If that’s what you want Mikey. But do I at least get a goodnight kiss?”

“As if you even needed to ask,” Mike replied instantly as he disconnected the arms laced around his hips and turned towards their owner for the first time.

When he first caught sight of the shorter man looking up at him lovingly, all he could do was stare for a moment or two with a contented smile on his face. The light of the lantern that hung above the doorway cascaded across Will's face like the light of an angel. Will's gorgeous features were outlined perfectly and Mike couldn't help but just fall more in love with him.

Will was everything he could ever want, and it felt like a dagger in the heart every time he was reminded that he couldn't spend his life with just him. Whenever he looked at him all he wanted to do was rip off his clothes and fuck him hard and fast into the bed. But at the same time he could spend hours just listening to his voice. If he only got to kiss Will once then he would die happy. But it wasn't just once, he got to do it over and over again because this amazing creature loved him back.

He felt the urge to cry approaching him, so he swiftly grabbed Will's chin and brought their lips together into a kiss that could melt icebergs from how heated it was. It may have been a short kiss that they quickly withdrew from, but it was also passionate and full of adoration as they both silently communicated how much they cared for each other. As they drew back, Mike's heart melted as Will's eyelids fluttered open and they smiled sheepishly at each other.

“Night, Mikey. I love you,” Will said softly after a sudden gust of wind brought them out of their loving daze.

“Night, Willy. I love you too,” Mike answered in the same heartbeat. And with that their hands disconnected and Mike watched as Will

walked back towards Mike's king sized bed. Will was dressed similar to he was, wearing only his rose red undergarments. As he walked away from Mike, the ravenette couldn't help but stare. Will's back muscles moved seamlessly and beautifully. Mike couldn't help but think again how lucky he was. If he hadn't been too distracted by Will's face a few minutes prior, then looking at Will's abdominal muscles would have definitely given him an erection.

As it was, however, Mike simply watched as his secret boyfriend climbed back under the royal blue bed covers and shifted slightly before lying comfortably. Mike watched the stunningly beautiful boy falling asleep for a few moments before turning back to face the city below. He sighed contentedly.

If he had Will by his side he could survive anything. And with that thought implanted, he couldn't bring himself to feel miserable for any longer that night.

Notes for the Chapter:

No idea when this is getting updated, chapter 2 is already fully planned out but I want to update Byler affair next then I want to update senior year so I don't know.

general-kj on Tumblr come talk to me :-)

Comments and kudos make me happy, as we are just starting out I will take suggestions into consideration :-)

2. Calm before the storm

Summary for the Chapter:

Mike and Will enjoy the day preceding the princesses arrival though it isn't all fun.

Notes for the Chapter:

I had chapter 2 planned out already so I thought I might as well write it. Don't believe i have to warn about anything other than mild violence in this chapter though there will be character deaths and graphic violence later on as well as smut. But no one we like will die.

Paladinscleric beta reads all my work now so thank you :-)

Enjoy :-)

Mike grunted with mild irritation when he felt the fabric surrounding his hand constricting too tightly to be comfortable. After this many years he thought that his servants would be able to dress him properly. It wasn't like it was getting dressed for the morning either. How hard is it to put his training armour on properly? If he had been allowed to put his armour on himself this would be a lot less stressful.

He wasted no time in informing his squire of his mistake before drifting back into his daydreams.

The morning had flown by swiftly, as was usual when there was something he really wasn't looking forward to on the horizon. Due to his late night exploits he had woken up really late and as a result had slept most of the morning away. He was surprised that he hadn't been woken up by a servant as he usually would have, but he later learned that Will had prevented them from disturbing him.

If only Will had the power to allow them to wake up together.

Will had entered the room at his behest only a few minutes after he had awoken, giving him a good morning kiss that made sparks fly. The brunette had then stayed with him whilst he ate his breakfast and then they had eaten their lunch together not long after. The bread served for his breakfast had started to harden by the time he had woken up, but he made do. Lunch was more pleasant though; roasted rabbit with some vegetables around the side.

He had received angry messages from his parents via servants that they were displeased that he wasn't eating breakfast and lunch with them, but he ignored them without a second thought. His morning and early afternoon had instead been spent talking with Will about everything but what was happening that afternoon. Luckily, he never ran out of things to talk about with Will and even if he did, he could happily just let Will talk to him.

Eventually though it was time for sparring practise. Which was why he was currently allowing his squire to fit his armour whilst Will's squire did the same to his boyfriend on the other side of the yard. Judging by how Will's adorable face was currently scrunched up with annoyance, Will's squire Richard wasn't doing any better than his own. He would chuckle if his squire weren't seemingly trying to cut off his airways at that very moment.

He really needed a new squire, Edward was absolutely worthless. His only redeemable feature was that he was pretty cute, but seeing as Mike already had Will for eye candy this didn't help him much. At least they only had to go through this palava occasionally, due to training only occurring a few times a week. If training was daily he would have murdered the poor boy by now.

The actual training at least was always enjoyable. Like in everything else Will was the perfect sparring partner for him. They knew each other's strengths and weaknesses perfectly. Every fight was fought tooth and nail. You could scarcely believe that this was the same boy who once confided to him that on the battlefield he would rather have been a healer than a warrior.

After what felt like the lifecycle of a tortoise his armour was finally fitted though and after a few stretches to check that fact, he leisurely ambled his way over to the sword rack. He briefly glanced over the

array of different sized swords, maces and axes before grabbing his usual steel greatsword. These were just training weapons with blunted edges, nothing flashy. His personal greatsword was one of the finest crafted weapons ever created. He was thankful that it was so easy to clean blood off of it.

Sword in hand he then makes his way over to the centre of the courtyard and takes a few test swings to reacquaint himself with the weight. His sword strokes swiftly whizzed through the warm air making a humming sound that was remarkably soothing. If there was any day where he wanted to hit something it was today.

A few more swings later and he felt warmed up enough to start. Ignoring the fact of course that he was already warm from how the sun was currently roasting him alive inside his chainmail. He looked over towards the other side of the courtyard and found that Will had just started walking in his direction. He quickly concluded that they were both ready so he started walking briskly towards the centre of the yard at the same pace as the brunette.

When they met in the middle they exchanged a loving smile of pure adoration that was small enough that it was invisible to the squires standing by the edge of the courtyard. Mike's smile soon turned into a frown, however, when he looked down and his eyes landed on Will's choice of weapon.

"Seriously?" Mike questioned with his eyebrows raised whilst Will simply shrugged and chuckled slightly. "Why is it that every time we fight your sword gets smaller?"

Will looked down for a second at the rapier he had his fingers wrapped around the hilt of. It was so thin that it could be mistaken for a needle. When he raised his head again, however, he was wearing a smirk. "Is that supposed to be an innuendo?"

Mike instantly felt blood rushing to his cheeks gallons at a time as the shorter man instantly started cackling with how red Mike must have looked. "Wha- no I mean argh just shut up," Mike stuttered out barely managing to formulate a glare as Will started going red in the face himself from laughter.

“Keep the dirty talk in the bedroom, Michael,” Will continued, giggling as Mike started to take deep breaths to regain his composure.

“Moving on,” Mike interjected eventually when they both had calmed down and their squires had stopped exchanging confused looks. “My point still stands. You can’t use that, it’s too small.”

“Don’t worry. I won’t cut you,” Will fired back instantly whilst flashing him a cheeky smile full of cockiness that immediately broke Mike’s resolve.

“I’ll try not to,” Mike responds through gritted teeth as they both raise their swords in readiness for the incoming battle.

They just leer at each other unmoving for a few seconds neither willing to make the first move, both equally ready to counter whatever attack that the other might make. All was quiet and calm until it wasn’t. Mike suddenly lunged at Will, attempting to disarm his opponent with one swing. However, it wasn’t meant to be. Will counters the attack with a swift flurry of strokes that ends up with Mike’s blade facing the ground and Wills pressed against Mike’s throat.

“Dead,” Will smirks triumphantly whilst Mike scowls. This is how all of their training sessions started when Will used ridiculously small blades. Mike attacks then Will easily counters it due to his lightweight sword allowing him to release a rapid barrage of blows. Admittedly this was his swiftest death yet though.

“What did you expect?” Mike grumbled. “No actual warriors use those things. There’s no point in learning to fight against someone using one.”

“There is every point, “ Will retorts. “It only takes one encounter to kill you, and I quite like you alive thank you very much.”

“Fine,” Mike concedes though he rolls his eyes dramatically. “But can we go back to using normal swords now?” Mike usually had a better chance of winning if Will used a normal sword, but he still lost frequently enough.

“On one condition.”

“And what might that be?”

“You admit that I fight like a water dancer and you fight like a blind man.”

“Fuck that.”

“Fine,” Will smirks as he steps a few paces forward so he could whisper in his ear. “Then I get to top tonight.”

Mike flushes at Will's words as is usual when Will says something dirty in public. He wouldn't usually have a problem with Will topping, but he had a feeling he would really need to fuck something hard tonight and Will's tight ass was his preferred option. From the victorious look etched on Will's features, the brunette obviously was thinking the same thing. This was obviously a ploy to get him to admit what he wanted him to. Will wins this round.

“You fight like a water dancer and I fight like a blind man,” Mike murmured so quietly that it was only just audible to Will.

“What was that?” Will questioned cheekily, his smirk not leaving his face for one moment. Mike just glares at him dangerously. They both know that they both heard him. “Fine,” Will concedes after a few moments with an eyeroll. “I guess I need a new sword. But we are doing this again whether you like it or not.” Will then gives him a pointed look as Mike nods begrudgingly.

Mike then just watches Will as he turns and briskly jogs over to the weapon rack and switches his blades. When Will returned he was gripping a steel broadsword between his dainty fingers. It was still significantly smaller than his own greatsword but it was at least it was a kind of sword he knew how to fight against. Though with that kind of sword he would have expected Will to use a shield, but Will had proven already that his choice in fighting style was quite unique so he let it go.

They both swiftly got back into a fighting stance and a few moments later they were off. Sword strokes whizzed back and forth through

the air as the clash of cold metal blades made clanging sound after clanging sound as they met again and again in their battle for supremacy. Each bout of swordplay lasted a lot longer than their first one had, each time a gruelling battle till the other made a small misstep. Every time this occurred, the loser found themselves disarmed with a sword to their throat whilst the victor declared them to be dead.

As per usual they remained fairly equal in their win/loss ratio until one of them decided to start doing something different. This time that person was Will, and Mike was quite unprepared for what the smaller man had in store for him. It was fair to say that Mike quickly learnt why Will didn't bother to pick up a shield.

Instead of blocking Mike's swings, Will began to start dodging and moving around the courtyard forcing Mike to follow him. Every time Mike made an attempt at cutting his opponent down, Will simply moved out of the way and allowed Mike to stumble forward. This routine was getting quite exhausting and Mike could feel a lake of sweat compiling on his brow.

This continued for a few more minutes, Mike getting more and more tired and sweaty from having to swing his heavy greatsword and missing his target. This was their longest fight yet. Will had not only carried on dodging, but he had started rolling around and making jabs at his legs which he was only just able to block.

At this point Mike was quite annoyed and was more than prepared to chew Will out for wasting his time. But as he was opening his mouth to complain he finally managed to land a good hit on Will's blade and it went crashing to the ground. He started smiling victoriously thinking he had won, but as he made to point his blade at Will to declare him dead Will rolled away to his left out of reach of both Mike and his sword.

Mike was so surprised that he didn't react for a moment, too bewildered by the exchange to move a muscle. He swiftly recovered and started turning to chase his boyfriend but by then it was too late. The winner of the fight was decided when he felt a dagger pressed into his back and Will's voice declared him double dead.

“Where the hell did you learn that?” Mike questioned, still bewildered from how quickly the tables had turned.

“No one,” Will casually replied as he released Mike from his grasp and walked over to his discarded sword and picked it up. “This is why I beat you so much. Skill beats strength every time.” Will smirked cockily at Mike as Mike himself continued to try and recover from how badly Will had embarrassed him. Mike opened his mouth to retort but he was quickly interrupted.

“Your highness. If I might interject,” an unknown voice said which caused both of their necks to snap towards the new sound in surprise. Mike quickly had to stifle a scowl once he saw who it was though.

“It is time for his majesty to get ready for the princesses' arrival,” the Steward Bob Newby stated in a monotone voice.

Mike rolled his eyes, but didn't argue and after exchanging a sad look with Will they both returned to their squires to allow their armour to be removed. It wasn't that he hated Newby, it's just that his arrival was always synonymous with him having to do something he didn't want to do. It didn't help that he always acted so proper and reserved when Mike knew in reality that he wasn't like this at all. The direction he let his eyes wander said it all.

Edward struggles a bit with the clasps but he manages to remove Mike's armour with less trouble than he had gone through to get it on. Left in just his tunic and breeches he briskly started stretching out his tired muscles.

Wills squire had done his job quicker than Mike's and by the time he had stretched and started walking towards the exit, Will was already leaning against the wall watching him. He stopped in front of the archway where Newby had positioned himself and Will quickly took his place next to him.

“You will now be escorted to your room where a tub will be waiting for you to wash yourself. After you are done your valet will enter to dress you. Once you are changed you will make your way to the council chamber where the king will be waiting for you,” Newby declared in a bored tone. Rapping off his list to him like he was

giving instructions to a toddler.

Mike was about to scowl with annoyance, but he was instead saved the inconvenience of having to be escorted by his companion. "Actually Newby. I can make sure Mike makes it to his room by myself," Will suggested innocently. Mike couldn't stop himself from beaming. That option sounded fantastic to him, it was no fun being surrounded by guards.

"But milord I have orders t--"

"I am quite capable of getting Mike to his chambers, I'm going the same direction so I might as well. The same result is achieved, consider these your new orders," Will commanded sternly. Mike was internally cheering as Newby's upper lip quivered with contemplation. Will's orders could not overrule the king's, but logically there was no need for them to be followed exactly. The steward seemed to decide that it was not worth it to argue so after a bow he turned on heel and left them.

As soon as the older man was out of sight Mike started giggling as he bent down slightly to whisper in Will's ear. "I love you," he murmured, probably looking like a lovesick puppy.

Will didn't even bother looking in his direction. Instead his boyfriend smirked and said, "I know."

Mike rolled his eyes at Will's teasing tone, but he still nudged him in the side affectionately with his hip. After a bit more giggling they set off towards their chambers, chattering happily. Mike having to ignore the urge to grip Will's soft hands in his own.

They walked briskly through the castle gardens, admiring the beauty of the rainbow assortment of blooming flowers almost as much as they admired each other's beauty. They made sure to dodge courtiers and servants as they meandered their way through the garden, joking and laughing all the way.

When they reached the castle itself, however, all the joy that filled them disappeared. Left outside along with the sun that had previously heated their backs, it felt like all the life had been

squeezed out of them. They still talked as they stalked the cold corridors but a lot more quietly. Suddenly fearful of someone interrupting their comfortableness with each other as something more.

It felt like the walls literally had ears in this castle. It wouldn't be the first time that Lord Byers had told them off for something he couldn't possibly know. His spies were everywhere, they had to assume that every single servant would betray them if they overheard something. He was like a prisoner in his own home, trapped and monitored at all times.

This was yet another reason why being a prince sucked.

The sound of their heavy boots hitting the stone floor echoed loudly off the thick walls creating an echo chamber like effect. The bulky red carpet doing little to muffle their footsteps as they walked through the castle. Servants rushed past them as they walked, all busy about their daily chores. They appeared to pay the pair no mind but Mike knew better from experience.

His eyes wandered over the castle walls as they made their way through crowded hallways and bounded up flights of stairs, taking in the various decorations. Long tapestries bearing the sigil of house Wheeler, a golden stag on a green background. Various animal heads taken and stuffed in past royal hunts. Weapon racks featuring a wide array of metal items that were threatening to rust. And most significantly, the numerous sets of shiny armour standing vigil against the walls, arms stretched out holding their polished lances in salute.

Mike's eyes lingered fondly on the suits of armour in particular as they passed by them. One of his favourite childhood memories involved his and Will's exploits with one of these empty vessels. Of course Will had been involved, as if there was any question of that.

The pair had been running giddily through the hallways chasing each other around the castle when he had fallen over, nearly crashing into one of the suits of armour as he did so. After some teasing Will had helped him to his feet and as he looked up at the suit of armour he had had the best idea he had ever had in his short life.

They were going to put on the suit of armour.

Will was unsure at first, but by that time Mike had already knocked over the suit and started fiddling with it so the smaller boy seemed to just go along with it. They grabbed various pieces of metal plate and attempted to put them on. The entire endeavour was a bit messy as the armour was far too big for them, but they persisted.

Eventually they managed to pull enough pieces off so that they were both adequately dressed. Mike had the breastplate and left gauntlet whilst Will had the right gauntlet and the helmet. However as they stood admiring their handiwork, the visor of Will's helmet suddenly slammed down over his face with an almighty clang. Will yelped in surprise whilst Mike roared with laughter.

After a lot of giggling they managed to pull the visor up and reveal Will's facial features again. Mike remembers pausing for a few seconds as he took in the sight in front of him. Will's face was lit up with glee, his face slightly tinted red from laughter. Mike remembers thinking how cute he looked as a funny feeling swelled in his stomach. He might not have understood the feeling at the time, but now he realised that that was the moment he started to realise he was in love with the brunette.

Their happy squeals of laughter quickly came to an end though, as the memory draws to its unhappy conclusion. Their noise and mess had attracted a lot of attention, and needless to say they were in trouble. The first on the scene was Lady Byers. Interestingly enough though she seemed quite amused by their exploits and if it had been left to her they probably would have been let off. Sadly, women had no say and her husband chose this moment to arrive.

Lord Byers was just as furious as could be expected. He chewed them out for what felt like hours before letting Mike go and taking Will with him. When Mike next saw Will, his arms were covered in bruises. This had happened frequently throughout their childhood which is why they were now so careful in the present. Mike obviously tried not to remember this part of the memory and instead keep it fond and loving.

Mike snapped out of his memories only once they reached his

doorway. Will opened the door and held it open for him with a mock bow which had them both giggling again. Once inside the room he hastily walked towards the tub of bubbling water, whilst Will closed the door behind them. He stuck a hand into the water and was relieved to find that it was still warm.

“Should I leave you to it Mikey?” Will asked from behind him, prompting Mike to turn to look at his partner again as he was still hesitating by the doorway.

Mike's face twisted into a pout. “Can't you stay?”

“I'm sorry, Mikey. You're not the only one who needs to get bathed and changed,” Will replied, giving Mike a sorrowful look.

Mike thought for a second before an idea popped into his head. “Can't we, you know, share?”

“I don't thi-“

“Why not?” Mike interrupted. “We can lock the door. No one would know.”

“Apart from the fact my own bathwater hasn't been used?” Will pointed out shaking his head forlornly. Mike starts to frown before Will starts to speak again. “I can't share your bathwater with you, but I can stay with you for a few minutes before I go to wash myself. How does that sound?”

“Amazing. Thank you, Willy,” Mike replied, beaming excitedly. “I love you.”

“I love you too,” Will responded, giving Mike a fond look as he bolted the door behind him. Will then walks over to Mike's cabinet and takes out the art supplies stored there as Mike watches on warmly. Will's art supplies had to be kept in Mike's room because if Lord Byers had found out that his son still was enjoying such a thing he would not be happy. Last time he had caught Will painting he had forced Will to watch as he snapped every single one of Will's paintbrushes in two.

But Mike didn't give a shit about Will's father's opinion. Will liked art

so Mike intended to make sure he kept doing it. In Mike's humble opinion Will was the best artist who had ever walked the earth. Though to be fair he was biased. Elaborate paintings and drawings of people, trees, sunsets, lakes, animals and more sprung to life on the paper, so unbelievably realistic and beautiful. If only the world could know how talented his boyfriend was.

After Will had finished retrieving his things, he closed the cabinet again and sat down at Mike's maple wood table and prepared himself to draw. At this point he gives Mike a pointed look as if to say, 'stop staring at me like a weirdo and get undressed.' Mike immediately stops staring and after giving Will a sheepish look he begins to strip.

His clothes fall away to reveal skin so pale that he could be a ghost along with his toned physique. He makes sure to smirk at the other boy when he sees Will pretending not to be stealing looks at him whilst he doodles aggressively with his ink quill. He obviously didn't mind Will looking. It was nothing he hadn't seen before in great detail, but it was still funny to see him feign ignorance to the fact Mike was naked.

He soon decides to put Will out of his misery and he swings a leg over the tub and lowers it into the warm water. He hisses slightly as his foot hits the warmth but he perseveres and he slowly gets used to the sensation of his leg being toasted as he continues to lower himself in. With one leg fully in he decides to just take the plunge with the rest of his body. So without further ado he swiftly jumps in the tub and sighs heavily as the water rushes to warm his limbs.

He makes himself comfortable leaning against the side of the wooden tub and closes his eyes as the steam rises from the tub in a thinly veiled attempt to blind him. Mike sighs again more contentedly. This was what he wanted his life to be like. Doing normal things with the person he loved nearby. No servants or responsibility. He was thankful he had persuaded his parents out of having someone wash him, though he still wished he had gotten the same luck on the dressing argument.

He opens his eyes again so he can look over at his gorgeous partner and bask in his presence. Will's face looked absolutely adorable twisted up in deep concentration as he scribbled away at the

parchment he held in place with his free hand. After a few minutes of staring, Will appears to feel the eyes on him and looks up to lock eyes with Mike, who starts to turn away sheepishly. Before he can though, Will stops him.

“If you splash me then I’m leaving,” he stated in an irritable voice.

“I wasn’t goi-“

“Don’t care, just don’t do it,” Will replied, cutting him off before he can deny the accusation. He watches as Will scrunches up the parchment he is working on and chucks it across the room furiously. Mike sighs in relief as he settles back into the water and closes his eyes, he was immensely glad that it wasn’t him that Will was frustrated with.

They just sit there for a few moments, peacefully enjoying each other’s company, the only sound being Will’s quill scratching away and the gentle lapping of Mike’s bathwater. Eventually though, Mike decides that he actually needs to fulfil the purpose of being in this position. So he grabs the soap from beside the tub and starts applying it to his limbs. Once that’s done he starts scrubbing himself. He starts with his extremities and works his way towards his core.

He only gets halfway through his task, however, when Will speaks up after glancing at the position of the sun. “I think I need to go now baby, your valet will be arriving soon,” Will informs him sadly as he starts to get up and put back his stuff.

“Do you have to?” Mike whines, pausing in his task.

“If you don’t want us to be executed then yes, I have to.”

“Can I at least see your drawing before you go?” Mike asks not expecting the response he receives. Will instantly pauses in his movements and goes bright red, suddenly looking like he had been sunburnt very badly.

“No.”

“Why not?” Mike asks, raising an eyebrow at Will who is trying to look in the other direction. Mike was now suddenly suspicious.

“Because I said so,” Will replies, as he starts packing away his things again, only this time twice as fast.

Mike sighs irritably before he replies in all seriousness. “Sweetie, if you don’t show me what you drew then I am going to chase you around this entire castle stark naked until I see it.”

Will turns to him in shock. “You wouldn’t.”

“Want to find out?” Mike responds, putting his hands on the edge of the tub ready to pull himself out to prove his point.

Mike watches as Will’s mouth twitches whilst a thousand scenarios appear to run through his head before Will sighs and gives in. Will grabs the picture from the table and makes his way over to him so that he could see it. Once the paper stops flapping with the force at which it was thrust into his face, Mike takes in the image in front of him. It was a sketch of a small building surrounded by trees and nature. It was stunning like everything else Will created, but he had no clue why Will didn’t want him to see it.

Will must have seen the confusion on his face, as he wasted no time in solving for him. “I was thinking about what you said last night. I drew somewhere we could live if we lived alone in the forest. But I didn’t want to upset you.”

Mike looked down at the drawing again to examine it. The building Will had drawn would be a great place to live. He wished wholeheartedly that this place was real. “I love it. When can we move in?” he asked eagerly. Will’s face twisted into a look of confusion, obviously not expecting his reaction.

“You’re not upset?”

“Why would I be? There’s nothing wrong with hoping for a better life. As long as it’s real in our minds then we can live there whenever we want,” Mike replied earnestly, pouring out his heart to his soulmate. Will seemed to be satisfied by his answer so they just sat there for a few moments. Will sat on the floor with his elbows and head resting on the edge of the tub as they stared into each other’s eyes, hearts full of joy.

Eventually though they seemed to realise that Will did actually need to be going. So after some more cleaning, an exchange of 'I love you' and a farewell kiss that sent shivers down his unclothed spine, Will unlocked the door and left. Now alone, Mike leant back in the tub and sighed miserably to himself before resuming his scrubbing.

He hurriedly washed his remaining limbs and dunked his head under water a few times to wash his raven curls as he was now concerned about the time pressure. Now adequately clean, he wavers a few more moments in the warm water, not willing to let it go too soon before hauling himself out of the tub. He grabs the nearby rag and rapidly dries himself before slipping on a new pair of silk undergarments.

He was just on time because as he was pulling them up the sound of someone knocking at his door resonated around his room. He groaned internally, his valet had arrived. He liked Bates well enough, but he hated the idea of having someone dress him. It wasn't like he had any choice though so he yelled for Bates to enter.

The man limped in and after some minor small talk they set about the task at hand. Mike was quickly dressed in tight leather breeches, a royal blue tunic emblazoned with exquisite patterns, and his shoulders were adorned with a brown cloak. All very fancy clothing which he really wasn't particularly fond of, but he knew he would have to wear more often. He hoped that he wouldn't have to see his valet more often than he already did. Twice a day was more than enough and today was already going to be three.

Once he was dressed, Bates left without another word, leaving him to frown to himself as he adjusted his clothing in the mirror. Once he was as satisfied as he could be with his appearance he made to leave, but before he could his eyes trained on a scrap of paper in the corner of his room. The drawing Will had scrunched up earlier. Mike couldn't help but be curious what it was so he went and picked it up.

He wasn't expecting his heart to melt when he uncrumpled it though. It was a drawing of him and Will kissing on Mike's balcony. It was absolutely incredible like everything Will created, but because the shorter boy was a perfectionist he was never satisfied. Mike had no intention of letting the symbol of their love in his hands go to waste

though, so before he could think better of it he slipped the drawing into his tunic and fixed it in place so it was over his heart.

With that done he strides over to the door and flings it open, not looking where he was going as he walks through it and straight into the person standing outside. He crashes into the stranger who was carrying a pile of washing, causing them both to fall over along with the washing.

“What the fuck do you think your doing?” Mike roars at the girl he’s knocked over, his frustration at the day he’s trapped in coming out full force at the stranger. The girl seems completely unperturbed as she climbs back to her feet and dusts off the maid outfit she was wearing. The look on her face told him that if he wasn’t a prince she wouldn’t hesitate to yell right back at him.

He took in the person that appeared to be a different species in front of him. She seemed to be a few years older than him and she was only a few inches shorter than him which was tall for a woman when he was a literal giant. Piercing blue eyes leered at him as they stood glaring at each other. Her freckles littered her face just as much as his own did, and her dirty blonde hair contrasted his own raven hair perfectly. She seemed rebellious, which was odd for someone in her position.

“I’m sorry milord, I was just coming to clean your room and put away some clothes. I didn’t realise you were still in here,” she said, her voice full of fake sweetness as her face twisted into a fake smile that totally didn’t say that she hated his guts. He recognised the clothing on the floor as his own though, so she appeared to be telling the truth.

“It’s fine. Just be more careful next time,” he sighed as he turned to start walking down the hallway away from the troublesome girl. He hears her mumble something under her breath, but he chooses to ignore it. He hoped he wouldn’t run into her again anytime soon.

He cursed internally to himself in annoyance for a few minutes before more pressing issues made him forget about the incident as he approached the council chambers. The walk through the castle hallways was a lot less enjoyable without his trusty companion.

Instead of feeling the familiar warmth of the love of his life by his side he just felt cold loneliness. That feeling of mild despair only grew as he drew closer to his destination.

He stopped when he was standing a few paces in front of the iron door. He took some deep breaths to calm himself down. Logically there was nothing to be afraid of. This was just going to be a meeting to tell him exactly what he was supposed to do when he was with the princess. He knew of its existence well in advance. But the symbols carved into the iron door did little to calm his nerves, symbols of purity and absence of sin. He was likely the most sinful person in this castle.

Mike knew that he had to go in eventually though, so after a few shakes of his head to clear his mind he grasped the handle and pushed open the door. He didn't bother knocking. What more could his father do to him against his will to punish him for his insolence? Arrange a second arranged marriage?

When he entered the room he immediately locked eyes with his father who was sitting in his usual position at the head of the council table. No words were spoken as he closed the door behind him and took the seat opposite the king. He wasn't usually allowed to sit at the table, but no one else was here to occupy the seats so he might as well. It wasn't the first time he had been in here. His father demanded that he come to observe the running of the kingdom sometimes, but this was his first time here when the meeting was about him.

His experience of the council had been mixed. Some meetings were interesting whilst others weren't. The council members were all as uninteresting as the next though, cruel old men loyal to his father. They all looked so similar that he had to rely on the pendants around their necks to distinguish what they were the master of. The masters of war, laws, coin and whispers along with the high priest Hargrove, Lord Byers and his father, the king made sure everything ran smoothly.

Whilst the conversations on defence formations, law making and commerce may have been boring, he made sure to pay attention to the others. The religious ones he listened to only for his only survival

rather than actual interest, but the whispers were interesting. Tales of plots and betrayal in rival kingdoms was certainly intriguing, but it was a different type of whisper that gripped his attention.

The exploration of the world.

For as long as he could remember he had been curious about what lay beyond the borders of the American kingdoms and now people were expressing the same curiosity. The northern kingdoms had started colonising the Canadian tundra whilst the southern ones had ventured into the Mexican desert. The eastern kingdoms had started sailing across the Atlantic whilst the western ones had started exploring the pacific. Even in the Caribbean new islands were being discovered. It was so miserable being in Indiana when all the excitement was on the fringes of the known world.

These fond memories of past tales were just a distraction from the cold uncaring look his father was giving as he glowered at him though, successfully making him feel small. "I assume you know why you're here," the king eventually said, breaking the silence. Mike could only nod in response and wait for instructions. He wasn't expecting to jump when a new but yet unfortunately familiar voice spoke from behind him causing him to swivel in his seat.

"You are here. To make sure that you don't mess this up," Lord Byers growled from his corner of the room where he was standing leaning against the wall. When Mike's eyes met Lonnie's, he instantly matched the older man's scowl. They had always despised each other. Mike had no idea why Lonnie hated him, but for his part he hated him because of how he treated Will.

Their shared hatred did little to change their standoff though. Lonnie couldn't touch him due to Mike being the crown prince, but that didn't mean he didn't berate him constantly. One of his earliest memories was when Lonnie had made him cry by sending a relentless stream of insults his way when he had accidentally broken a plate. He was six years old. Mike had made sure to be as rebellious as possible to the man growing up whilst simultaneously keeping Will safe.

After exchanging another look of hatred with Lonnie, he turned back

to face his father who had cleared his throat in preparation to speak. "I trust I do not need to remind you just how important this match is? This marriage is essential to the future of our house. The union of our kingdoms is essential to our survival," the king said, still somehow managing to sound bored. Mike yet again nodded. He had been told the implications of this marriage many times before.

King Jim was old and his health was starting to fail, meaning a succession crisis was imminent. His only child was his daughter Princess Eleanor, making her the sole claimant. But due to inheritance laws, if she married the claim would pass to her husband. Meaning that if Mike married her then once the king died the kingdoms of Indiana and Illinois would become one.

The union of kingdoms was hardly uncommon. Only 5 years ago Oklahoma had been absorbed by Texas. But in the changing world it was becoming necessary to become more powerful to survive. The kingdom of New England had been formed a few years back when the king of Massachusetts had invaded all his neighbours, and now many were worried the same thing could happen elsewhere. Indiana's position was weak. They were a resource poor kingdom with equally powerful neighbours and no ocean coastline for trade. They had three options if they wanted to survive: befriend their neighbours, invade a neighbour or unite with a neighbour.

They had already tried befriending. He had played a large part in the alliances with Ohio and Kentucky even if Lonnie had tried to argue for invading Ohio over befriending it. They couldn't befriend their northern neighbour Michigan though, due to House Harrington's long term grievance with his father's execution of King Steve's parents. So therefore they needed to exploit the maiden of Illinois to further their agenda and prevent an invasion from the north.

Luckily for them the only condition for his marriage to princess Eleanor was that he was kind and courteous. Which is why he spent the next hour listening to a lecture of how to do everything from manners to how to woo her to how to kiss her properly. Needless to say he was thoroughly grateful when they finished the conversation and they all stood up to leave. He hated being included in their schemes.

He allowed his father and Lonnie to leave first to give himself some more time to mentally process the fact that he was about to meet his future bride that he had no interest in. His father gave him a meaningful look as he placed a hand on his shoulder when he passed as if to say, 'don't mess this up.' How comforting.

He had never been more relieved when the door slammed closed behind the pair. He groaned loudly as soon as they left, barely resisting the urge to simultaneously throw up and bang his head against a wall till he knocked himself out. This was going to be the worst experience of his life. Pretending to be interested in a woman with the entire court watching.

His life sucked.

Notes for the Chapter:

There was a metric shit tonne of references and lore dumping in this chapter. I'm an absolute geography and history nerd so i had to create something using that knowledge lol

Tomorrow is my birthday and not long after that I'm going on holiday with family so this will likely be my last update for a little while, I plan on writing the next chapter of byler affair when I'm back though.

Comments and kudos mean the world to me :-)